

**IN THE SPECIFICATION**

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 2, line 12 as follows.

C | The gas passage 24a is formed between the inner tube 22 and the outer tube 23 arranged outside the same, and an inert gas is supplied from the gas supplying inlet 24 to the gas passage 24a, so as to blow the inert gas into the inside of the inner tube 22 from the numerous gas blowing inlets 22a provided circumferentially and in the height direction on the wall surface of the inner tube 22. The inert gas is flowed inside the inner tube 22 and the muffle tube 28 to prevent oxidation deterioration of the muffle tube and the like, and when the temperature distribution of the inert gas by heating and the flow of the inert as are not uniform, fluctuation of the diameter of the optical fiber drawn from the preform is liable to occur.